

The University of Chicago

THE LITERARY OPPOSITION
TO SIR ROBERT WALPOLE, 1721-1742
FIELDING'S ATTACKS ON
WALPOLE

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE

1934

By
MABEL DOROTHY HESSLER

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CHAPTER IX

FIELDING'S ATTACKS ON WALPOLE

Fielding's interest in the political controversy began on his return to England from Leyden, in 1729. We may infer, from the verses he addressed to Walpole in 1729 and 1730, and from the farces of 1730-1734, that in those years he was inclined to take the quarrels of Court and Country rather lightly. In the business of government there was a good deal, as we have seen, to occupy the attention of the satirist. But the folly--not to say vice--was not all on one side; and Fielding was apparently entertained, before he became disgusted, at the evidence of corruption in government, and at the charges brought against the government, too often by persons of not impeccable virtue. Then too, in the political writing of those years there was, one may pardonably think, more to amuse anyone with a sense of humor than there was to command respect. Fielding, we may imagine, was amused by the persistence with which poets and playwrights, all in vain, wrote dedications and congratulatory verses to a "certain great man" at Westminster, and by the petty virulence of the pamphleteers and journalists on either side. At any rate, during the five years after his return to England, Fielding used this political background in Tom Thumb, the Grub Street opera, and Don Quixote in England, which are, though satirical, primarily farces.

Tom Thumb (1730; 1731) is not significant as a political play; it is even possible that the subtle satire on Walpole is only read into it by persons who are looking for just that. If one sees such satire in the play, it amounts to this, as Cross

puts it, that "Fielding reduced the Prime Minister to a pigmy . . . making the little man more powerful than men, giants, and the gods combined, and then throwing doubt upon his claims to have killed the giants at all."¹ There is this to be said for a political interpretation, that in the preface to a New Norfolk ballad, of 1730 or 1731, there is a paragraph making a parallel between the Noodle and Doodle of the Tragedy of tragedies and several pairs of contemporary politicians:

Whoever has read the Annals of King Arthur of immortal Memory will find that there were two brothers in his Court who made very distinguishing Figures. Their names were Noodle and Doodle.²

As the ballad concerns the Treaty of Vienna, and as it bears the Horatian motto (Par nobile fratrum) frequently used by the Opposition to call to mind the brothers Walpole, the allusion in the ballad is fairly plain, though there is incidental satire on other pairs of politicians. I have not noticed, however, any allusions in Opposition literature, to Sir Robert as Tom Thumb, and I am inclined to think that the journalists of the Opposition saw no such satire in Fielding's play, for they missed few opportunities of referring to contemporary satires of him.

The satire in the Grub Street opera (1731) is apparent enough. We may disregard, for our purpose, the burlesque of the domestic affairs of the royal family, and consider only the treatment of their "servants." Robin is of course Walpole, and Will is William Pulteney; John and Thomas have been identified as Hervey and Newcastle.

When the play was brought out, the old quarrel between

¹Wilbur L. Cross, The history of Henry Fielding (New Haven, 1918), I, 103.

²A new Norfolk ballad, concerning the late Vienna treaty. Tune of, A trifling song you shall hear, etc. (London, 1731); see Milton O. Percival, Political ballads illustrating the administration of Sir Robert Walpole (Oxford, 1916), appendix, No. 32.

Walpole and Pulteney had reached its climax, and Walpole was about to turn Pulteney out of his place.³ Their verbal duels in the House of Commons had been features of every debate for some ten years; and these were now matched, on a somewhat lower level, by the retorts extremely discourteous of the pamphlets they wrote and hired written against each other.⁴ Over one pamphlet Pulteney fought a duel with Hervey, who wrote many of the ministerial pamphlets.

The duel between Robin and Will in the play has been supposed to burlesque the duel between Hervey and Pulteney, with the shift of characters for dramatic effect.⁵ It may also allude to the quarrel between Walpole and Pulteney.⁶ Elsewhere in the play the political charges and counter-charges are burlesqued. Fielding says in the introduction, "This sort of wit . . . hath flourished among our political members a long while. Nay, in short,

³Pulteney lost his last place, as Commissioner of the Peace for Middlesex County, early in July, 1731; see Gentleman's magazine, I, 307.

⁴Sedition and defamation display'd (London, 1731), A proper reply to a late scurrilous libel intitled, Sedition and defamation display'd (London, 1731), and A letter to Caleb D'Anvers, Esq; on his proper reply (London, 1731) may be taken as fairly typical; these three all appeared in the first two months of the year; see advertisements in Gent. mag.

⁵Cross, I, 107.

⁶Historical register for 1731, chronological diary, Jan. 25, and Gent. mag., I (1731), 28, both give, as the reason for Hervey's challenge, that Pulteney was supposed to have written A proper reply. It is suggested in Iago display'd (London: A Moore [n.d.]), that Walpole set Hervey on; the pamphlet tells the story of the Walpole-Pulteney quarrel in terms of Othello: Othello is George II, Iago is Walpole, Cassio is Pulteney, and Roderigo is Hervey; and Roderigo is persuaded by Iago to fight a duel with Cassio. The same suggestion is made in The countess's speech to her son Roderigo, upon her first seeing him, after he was wounded in his late duel (London: R. Walker [n.d.]), in which Walpole is alluded to as a "fat gentleman who thinks fit to plunder his country." Fielding perhaps meant the same thing by his shift of the characters in the duel--that it was, after all, Walpole's quarrel.

it is the only wit that flourishes among them." Will accuses Robin of keeping the peace only because he is really a coward;⁷ Robin says Will is a quarrelsome fellow who stirs up trouble wherever he is,⁸ and accuses Robin of cheating only because he wants Robin's place.⁹ Robin also threatens Will for insubordination: "But perhaps you may find me too cunning for you, and while you are attempting my place, you may lose your own."¹⁰ And Will offers the familiar criticism of Walpole: "He knows his own demerits, and therefore is jealous of every man he sees for a rival."¹¹

It is chiefly in the quarrel of the servants that Walpole's corruption is alluded to, but the allusion is nevertheless there. Will's "Any man may have your mistress that can outbid you, for it is very well known you never had a mistress without paying for her"¹² may quite possibly allude to Walpole's bribery in elections and his place-system. In many respects the play recalls the numerous allegories in which Walpole was represented as a dishonest servant. The brazen cheating of all the servants is a mark of the satire throughout. According to William, Robin has filed the plate, or stolen it, sold the glasses, given away the household beer to his brother, charged for costly supplies and used cheap

⁷Grub Street opera, Act II, sc. iv. Cited in Leslie Stephen's edition of Fielding's Works (London, 1882), as are all other pieces by Fielding, except when another reference is indicated.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Act II, sc. iv; Act III, sc. v. Cf. also Act I, sc. v, Sweetissa's "I know you are prejudiced against him from what William says; but be assured that is all malice; he is desirous of getting his place . . . an upper servant's honesty is never so conspicuous, as when he is abused by the under-servants.-- They must rail at some one, and if they abuse him, he preserves his master and mistress from abuse." Cf. also Air V:

"At court, the man, whose interest fails,
Cries, All is Corruption, and cheating."

¹⁰Act II, sc. iv.

¹¹Act III, sc. xiv.

¹²Act II, sc. iv.

ones. But the other servants cheat, too. And Fielding's attitude is non-partisan. Parson Puzzletext comments:

I think it is a difficult matter to determine which deserves to be hanged most; and if Robin, the butler, hath cheated more than other people, I see no other reason for it, but because he hath had more opportunity to cheat.¹³

As to corruption, Fielding seems to be saying, there was not much difference between Court and Country parties.

Fielding prefaced his next political play, Don Quixote in England (1734), with a dedication to Chesterfield, who had recently lost his place at Court by opposing the Excise Bill. Fielding praised him as one "who hath . . . gloriously distinguished himself in the cause of liberty," and asserted his own devotion to that cause, "to which," he says, "the corruption I have here endeavoured to expose may one day be a very fatal enemy." Having virtually declared himself of the Opposition, Fielding drew the Earl's attention to the "force of theatrical ridicule," particularly with reference to politics: "I fancy a lively representation of the calamities brought on a country by general corruption might have a very sensible and useful effect on the spectators." Moreover, he hinted that the ministry was at fault in declining to give assistance to literature:

There are among us who seem so sensible of the danger of wit and humour, that they are resolved to have nothing to do with them; and indeed they are in the right on't; for wit like hunger, will be with great difficulty restrained from falling on, where there is great plenty and variety of food.

In this part of the dedication he identified the administration with "the powerful sons of dulness," who "shed all their influence on their inferior brethren," suggesting what the Opposition journalists liked to say about the writers for the government, and foreshadowing the Kingdom of Nonsense of Pasquin. If the Ministers

¹³Act III, sc. xiv.

would not support good literature, and would maintain stupid writers, it must be, Fielding was intimating, because they shared the inanity of these writers, and were capable of acting as well as speaking nonsensically.

The play itself is less definitely in favor of the Opposition. It was a satire on elections; like the Country party, Fielding was opposed to bribery in elections. But Fielding seems to have been more interested in showing how the electors accept, and even demand, bribes, than in portraying the dishonesty of the candidates who offer them. One may suppose that Fielding did not hold with the arguments in the Craftsman, that corruption begins at the top, and that people are made corrupt by their "betters"; he seems to have thought it much more likely that the people could be naturally just as selfish and corrupt as their social superiors.

The mayor explains the system: "when we invite a gentleman to stand, we invite him to spend his money for the honour of his party; and, when both parties have spent as much as they are able, every honest man will vote according to his conscience."¹⁴ What that means, he also explains:

I have very earnestly recommended the country interest to all my brethren; but before that I recommended the town interest, that is, the interest of this corporation; and, first of all, I recommended to every particular man to take a particular care of himself. And it is with a certain way of reasoning, that he that serves me best will serve the town best, and he that serves the town best will serve the country best.¹⁵

The fact was that the corporation would get all it could out of both sides, and be perfectly indifferent to the outcome.

Furthermore, Fielding accused the Country party as well as the Court party. His scenes show that the bribery came from both sides, and he left the party-identification of the candidates

¹⁴Act I, sc. ix.

¹⁵Ibid.

in pleasant confusion. Don Quixote, who speaks the language of the Country party, appears to the Mayor, "by his promises," to be a courtier.¹⁶

There is one thrust at Sir Robert, rather good-humored than malicious: Sancho says to himself, "Well, if ever I do lay my fingers on an island more, I'll act like other wise governors, fall to plundering as fast as I can; and when I have made my fortune, why, let them turn me out if they will."¹⁷

Fielding had made one attempt during these five years to get some recognition from Walpole. In 1732 he dedicated the Modern husband to him. It is likely that he was serious in this appeal to Walpole to "protect an art" which promised such "notable advantages." Whether Walpole made any reply we do not know. Years later, the writer of a pamphlet on the journalists of the period accused Fielding of ingratitude, saying that Walpole had been generous to him and had given him money to get him off from a jail sentence on one occasion.¹⁸ The account sounds plausible enough, but in the absence of any further evidence one cannot judge the case. Fielding, at any rate, went on to further and more downright satire on the Prime Minister.

In Pasquin (1736) he developed at greater length the satire he had suggested in Don Quixote. Election scenes, in Pasquin, made up a comedy in rehearsal; and a "tragedy" was made of the triumph of dulness over wit. It is satire in earnest, making the political spectacle a "ridiculous exhibition," but displaying it as not merely laughable but contemptible, and even vicious.

¹⁶Act II, sc. iiii.

¹⁷Act II, sc. xiv.

¹⁸An historical view of the principles, characters, persons, etc. of the political writers in Great Britain (London, 1740), pp. 48-51.

The satire on elections is distributed between the two parties. Both Court and Country candidates try to bribe their electors, "indirect" bribery being the method of the Country. Sir Harry makes a speech against bribery:

. . . will you be bribed to sell your country? Where do you think these courtiers get the money they bribe you with, but from yourselves? Do you think a man, who will give a bribe, won't take one? If you would be served faithfully, you must choose faithfully; and give your vote on no consideration but merit; for my part, I would as soon suborn an evidence at an assize, as [a] vote at an election.¹⁹

This virtuous speech is followed by a scene of "indirect" bribing--ordering clothes and silks and timber from the merchants of the borough.

As in Don Quixote, too, the electors are shown to be just as corrupt and selfish as the candidates, and ignorant as well as selfish, for they have picked up the catch phrases of both parties without understanding them at all. One alderman (put in, Trapwit says, because "you must have one fool in a play")²⁰ repeats an old argument of the Opposition: since we cannot choose all four of these worthy candidates, he says, "I think we should stand by our neighbours; gentlemen whose honesty we are witnesses of, and whose estates in our own neighborhood render 'em not liable to be bribed."²¹ The alderman is easily downed by the Mayor, who gives the Court party's answer: "Mr. Alderman, you have a narrow way of thinking; honesty is not confined to a county; a man that lives an hundred miles off may be as honest as him who lives but three."²²

Yet there were particular touches that suggest that Fielding had Walpole in mind more definitely than before. Lord Place asks the Mayor's leave to "squeeze" him "by the hand," and

¹⁹Act I, Works, X, 137.

²⁰Ibid., p. 134.

²¹Ibid., p. 133.

²²Ibid., p. 134.

is warned by Trapwit to bribe more openly, that the joke may not be lost on the audience.²³ This piece of business recalls a paper in the Craftsman, in which "a certain great man," pleading with his courtiers to support him, "went round the whole assembly, man by man, squeezing them very feelingly by the hand."²⁴

In another scene²⁵ of the play Fielding commented on the political journals. Miss Stitch and the Mayor's daughter quarrel over the respective merits of the Craftsman and the Gazetteer. "This scene," Cross says, "gave Fielding an opportunity to pay his compliments to 'The Gazetteer', which, he says, the government was sending through the kingdom 'every week for nothing'; and the garrulous editor in the pay of Walpole, he called 'an old woman.'"²⁶ One must remember, however, the dramatic significance of the lines: it is Miss Stitch who says these things, and she has, of course, got them from the Craftsman. Fielding's "compliments," indeed, are sent in both directions, for it was not very high praise for the Craftsman that could come from so silly a person as Miss Stitch. The nickname of "old woman" for the writer of the Gazetteer was the invention of a writer in the Craftsman in 1733. In an essay in that journal, the writer, recalling a "learned Dissertation on old Women, Male and Female," said that everything Mr. Osborne wrote reminded him of his "granny"; it all sounded like "feminine dotage."²⁷ From that time on, the Craftsman never referred to "Osborne" except as "Mrs. Osborne," or "Mother

²³Ibid., p. 135.

²⁴Craftsman, No. 369, 28 July 1733.

²⁵Act II, Works, X, 152-4.

²⁶I, 182.

²⁷Craftsman, No. 346, 17 Feb. 1732/33.

According to Frederick T. Wood, Notes and queries, CLXVI (1934), 349-50, the Learned dissertation, which appeared in 1720, was itself a political satire, holding the Tories up to ridicule.

Osborne," or "the old woman." After Pasquin had been on the stage for some time, the writer of the Craftsman decided that he could have another joke at the expense of that writer, and wrote an essay restoring manhood to Osborne. This poor man, wrote the humorist,

hath been made the Butt of the whole Town, for above forty Nights together, upon the Publick Stage, by a pert little Baggage, in the character of Miss Stitch; and, what is still worse than all, it is confidently reported that even the honourable Gentleman, his Patron, hath lately been so ungenerous as to insult Him, upon the same Account.²⁸

I do not know what Walpole's "insult" was; it is likely that the writer alludes to one of the pamphlets in which Walpole is represented as berating his scribblers for their bad writing. The other allusion is clear enough; Fielding knew what the Craftsman said of the ministerial writers, and the Craftsman made the most of his gibe.

In the rehearsal of the tragedy, Fielding recalled the identification of the government with the Kingdom of Nonsense which he had hinted at in the dedication of Don Quixote. This kind of satire was common enough in the Craftsman, whose writers liked to make Walpole out a blunderer, and to give credit not to him but to chance for what the Ministry did accomplish. In Pasquin, Fielding has Ignorance prevail over Common-sense and declare that intelligence and ability are easily defeated by blunderers:

Queen Ignorance. . . . Why should a wise man
wish to think, when thought
Still hurts his pride? in spite of all his art,
Malicious fortune, by a lucky train
Of accidents, shall still defeat his schemes,
And set the greatest blunderer above him.

Queen Common-sense replies that under her rule this could not be true:

²⁸Craftsman, No. 512, 24 April 1736.

Urgest thou that against me, which thyself
Has been the wicked cause of? Which thy power,
Thy artifice, thy favourites have done?
Could Common-sense bear universal sway,
No fool could ever possibly be great.²⁹

She predicts the calamities that will be the result of the triumph of Ignorance, in the course of her speech prophesying thus:

Places, requiring learning and great parts,
Henceforth shall all be hustled in a hat,
And drawn by men deficient in them both.³⁰

Though this may be an allusion to some particular appointment, it was a prophecy that the Opposition would say had been a fact since the reign of the great blunderer had begun. Walpole's brother Horatio was ridiculed by the Opposition as an ignorant fool who held high posts and blundered in affairs of state entrusted to him. Sir Robert had dismissed "men of learning and great parts" when he asked Chesterfield and others to resign, in 1733 and 1734. Moreover, instead of being hospitable to writers of talent, he hired the most incompetent scribblers to defend him. He was, they said, a favorite son of dulness.

Other political allusions in the play are less damning to Sir Robert. When asked why Queen Common-sense is asleep, Fustian replies: "Why, sir, she has been meditating on the present general peace of Europe, till by too intense an application, not

²⁹Act V, Works, X, 182-3.

³⁰Ibid., p. 187.

Cf. also Act IV, sc. 1, ibid., p. 170, Firebrand's speech, which will bear a similar interpretation:

"I am an enemy to Common-sense;
But this not for ambition's earthly cause,
But to enlarge the worship of the Sun:
To give his priests a just degree of power,
And more than half the profits of the land
. . . . Here, survey this list.
In it you'll find a certain set of names,
Whom well I know sure friends to Common-sense;
These it must be our care to represent
The greatest enemies to the gods and her."

being able thoroughly to comprehend it, she was overpowered and fell fast asleep."³¹ Perhaps this alludes to the treaty of Vienna, the latest security for the "general peace of Europe." It was a constant subject for the journals in the first months of 1736, and the Craftsman was not inclined to be friendly to it. One recalls that Miss Stitch, that inveterate reader of the Craftsman, had been mistrustful of it. A similar touch is the introduction of the Irish drummer who is tired of being a soldier without fighting. His comments recall some of the Opposition's remarks about Walpole's reluctance to fight. He says:

Upon my shoul but I have been a drummer these twenty years,
master, and have seen no wars yet; and I was willing to learn
a little of my trade before I died.
Fustian. Hush, sirrah, don't you be witty; that is not in
your part.
Drummer. I don't know what is in my part, sir; but I desire
to have something in it; for I have been tired of doing
nothing a great while.³²

Then there is a passage which seems to allude to the Bill (introduced by the Opposition) for the repeal of the Test Act, and lost, by Walpole's opposition and the negative votes of the high-churchmen: Queen Common-sense is thus warned by Firebrand:

if such toleration
Be suffered, as at present you maintain,
Shortly your court will be a court of ghosts.
Make a huge fire and burn all unbelievers,
Ghosts will be hanged ere venture near a fire.

She replies in a spirit of toleration:

Men cannot force belief upon themselves.
And shall I then by torture force it on them?

Firebrand answers:

The sun will have it so.³³

If the satire in this play seems somewhat vague, and if

³¹Act IV, ibid., p. 174.

³²Act V, ibid., X, 182.

³³Act IV, ibid., p. 177.

Fielding had, in some respects at least, condemned all parties, he came out boldly enough in the Historical register (1737) with satire on the "great man" which no one could miss or ignore. The "Dedication to the Public" begins as an ingenious parody of political journalism which embodies familiar criticism of the government. The design of his plays, Fielding says, is

to convey some hints, which may, if you please, be of infinite service in the present state of that theatrical world whereof they treat, and which is, I think, at present so far from flourishing as one could wish, that I have with concern observed some steps lately taken, and others too justly apprehended, that may much endanger the constitution of the British theatre.³⁴

He goes on to talk of "arbitrary" proceedings, and "exorbitant prices" which have to be paid, eventually, by the people; of the "present flourishing state of trade and riches" in which the town can pay high prices; and of the "worse times" which may befall, in which those expenses will seem too heavy. He talks of buying off chief actors. And finally he comes out and says what has been in his mind; it is the old theme of the Opposition:

. . . corruption has the same influence on all societies, all bodies, which it hath on corporeal bodies, where we see it always produce an entire destruction and total change; for which reason, whoever attempteth to introduce corruption into any community doth much the same thing, and ought to be treated in much the same manner with him who poisoneth a fountain, in order to disperse a contagion, which he is sure every one will drink of.³⁵

Except that he is, ostensibly, at any rate, talking about the state of the theatre, he might be read as a political writer. He himself suggests the political meaning of the dedication when he defends the Historical register from certain charges the Gazetteer had brought, saying that in reality his play is a "ministerial pamphlet, calculated to infuse into the minds of the people a

³⁴Ibid., p. 196.

³⁵Ibid.

great opinion of their ministry, and thereby procure an employment for the Author, who has often been promised one, whenever he would write on that side."³⁶ After that he turns to a denunciation of mean men in power, easily recognized as an attack on Walpole, and on general corruption:

I hope too it will be remarked, that the politicians are represented as a set of blundering blockheads rather deserving pity than abhorrence, whereas the others are represented as a set of cunning, self-interested fellows, who for a little paltry bribe would give up the liberties and properties of their country. Here is the danger, here is the rock on which our constitution must, if ever it does, split. The liberties of a people have been subdued by the conquest of valour and force, and have been betrayed by the subtle and dextrous arts of refined policy, but these are rare instances; for geniuses of this kind are not the growth of every age, whereas, if a general corruption be once introduced, and those who should be the guardians and bulwarks of our liberty, once find, or think they find, an interest in giving it up, no great capacity will be required to destroy it; on the contrary, the meanest, lowest, dirtiest fellow, if such a one should ever have the assurance in future ages to mimic power, and brow-beat his betters, will be as able, as Machiavel himself could have been, to root out the liberties of the bravest people.³⁷

This sounds like a passage out of Bolingbroke's Dissertation on parties, or his Remarks on the history of England. It at any rate paraphrases Bolingbroke's ideas.

And then Fielding anticipates the question that readers will ask:

Who is Quidam? Who but the devil could act such a part? . . . Indeed it is so plain who is meant by this Quidam, that he who maketh any wrong application thereof, might as well mistake the name of Thomas for John, or old Nick for old Bob.³⁸

And with that neat suggestion by the use of one of Walpole's nicknames, Fielding leaves the rest to the reader.

In the play he develops the "resemblance between the states political and theatrical," and by showing Pistol in his

³⁶Ibid., p. 197.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 198-9.

³⁸Ibid., p. 199.

"ministerial capacity,"³⁹ suggests that Sir Robert Walpole is as great a fool as Theophilus Cibber, the acknowledged fool of the theatrical world. At another time he implies that Walpole is like an impudent actor: when Quidam is discovered offstage, laughing at the "patriots," he explains that the actor is "a pure impudent fellow, and can stand the hisses of them all; I chose him particularly for the part."⁴⁰ There is satire on Walpole's neglect of foreign affairs: the politicians sitting about the table say, "Hang foreign affairs; let us apply ourselves to money."⁴¹ There are allusions to the low esteem in which political honesty and patriotism are held. In the auction the former goes to Lord Bothsides for five pounds, and the latter is put up as "only proper for the country,"⁴² but potentially useful for an election. A "considerable quantity of interest at court," on the other hand, is sold for a thousand pounds.⁴³

And yet, for all its satire on the Ministry, the Historical register also attacked those members of the Country party who were beginning to see that they might get into office by being less "patriotic." The "patriots" satirized in the third act of the play are the noisy, the cautious, the selfish, the indolent ones. When we recall what Chesterfield and Lyttelton were writing to each other and to their other friends about the conduct of the Opposition in 1736 and 1737, we are led to think that Fielding is here satirizing the members of the Opposition who followed Carteret and Pulteney. They are, Fielding says, being duped by Walpole; he will bribe them to get what he wants and get the money back

³⁹Act II, ibid., p. 222.

⁴⁰Act III, ibid., p. 230.

⁴¹Act I, ibid., pp. 209-10.

⁴²Act II, ibid., p. 218.

⁴³Ibid., p. 220.

after he has finished with them. The dance of the patriots at the end "plainly intimates," he says, "that when patriotism is turned into a jest, there is an end of the whole play."⁴⁴ Whether he means that Walpole turns it to a jest--Walpole was reported to have laughed cynically at the idea of patriotism--or that certain Patriots had done so, by their repudiation of the original motives of the Opposition, he was perfectly in accord with Chesterfield and Lyttelton and their group.

Eurydice hiss'd, which was published with the Historical register, is another violent satire on the government. Like the Historical register, it uses the allegory of the theatrical world for the political. Pillage, the author-minister (his very name is enough to identify him) opens with a speech describing his situation:

Who'd wish to be the author of a farce,
Surrounded daily by a crowd of actors,
Gaping for parts, and never to be satisfied?
Yet, say the wise, in loftier seats of life,
Solicitation is the chief reward;
And Wolsey's self, that mighty minister,
In the full height and zenith of his power,
Amid a crowd of sycophants and slaves,
Was but perhaps the author of a farce,
Perhaps a damned one too. 'Tis all a cheat,
Some men play little farces, and some great.⁴⁵

There is satire on the needless expense of the theatre--that is, of the government;⁴⁶ on the practice of hiring claqueurs for the theatre--that is, voters for the Ministry;⁴⁷ on "the blundering

⁴⁴Act III, ibid., p. 229.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 260.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 265.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 263:

"Pillage: I defy the town: if by my friends,
Against their liking I support my farce,
And fill my loaded pockets with their pence,
Let after-ages damn me if they please."

Cf. p. 264:

"I have so many friends
That the majority will sure be mine."

brain of scribblers" who can be paid to "write away their country's liberties."⁴⁸ And the sentiment of the Historical register is echoed by the author in the play: "Talking of liberty made me serious in spite of my teeth, for between you and me, Mr. Sourwit, I think that affair is past a jest."⁴⁹

In this play, too, Fielding wrote lines that may have been intended to satirize the Patriots who were turning their backs on the Opposition. As Fielding's allegory was always ambiguous, positive identification is often hazardous, but the poet's fair-weather friends may represent those members of the Opposition who were suspected of making sure of places for themselves. Fielding wrote:

But it was mighty pleasant to behold,
When the damnation of the farce was sure,
How all those friends who had begun the claps,
With greatest vigour strove who first should hiss,
And show disapprobation.⁵⁰

This was the last of Fielding's dramatic satires on politics. The plays were perhaps too effective. The government was growing touchy about political satire; Walpole had heard as much as he wanted to hear. The Historical register was performed probably in the last week of March, 1737. In May the Licensing Act was passed, which put an end to Fielding's theatre.

Fielding's plays have here been considered solely in their political aspects, though they are by no means solely political plays. On reconsidering them, indeed, one is struck by the variety of the satire in them. This fact does not lessen their political significance, of course. Rather, one feels, the brilliance of the plays is in large part due to Fielding's ability to make one symbol

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 266.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 267.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 269.

stand for several things or persons--to satirize, in the same lines, the mismanagement of the theatre, and the maladministration of government; Theophilus Cibber, and Sir Robert Walpole.

Forced to stop writing plays, Fielding began, apparently at once, to write for Common sense, the new journal of the Opposition, which he had possibly had in mind when he wrote the Dedication to the Historical register. In 1739-41 he was writing the Champion, with the assistance of James Ralph. These two papers are probably to be regarded as the journals of the new Opposition, the group of Chesterfield and Lyttelton. Fielding's connection with the Opposition throughout is largely due to his association with these men. In Common sense and the Champion Fielding employed with wit and ingenuity the devices that had been in use for some years in the Craftsman. The serious criticisms of the government, the allegories of corruption, the satirical "advertisements," the sarcastic notes among the news items, are all similar to those in the earlier paper, and add little, except in quantity, to the charges against Walpole.

While he was engaged on these papers, Fielding seems also to have written some pamphlets for the Opposition.⁵¹ Perhaps the most important of these is the "epic poem," the Vernoniad (1741) celebrating the character and exploits of Admiral Vernon, and satirizing the Ministry for its failure to support him adequately.⁵²

⁵¹The crisis: a sermon necessary to be preached at or before the next general election (1741); see Cross, I, 295-7; John Nichols, Literary anecdotes of the eighteenth century (London, 1812), VIII, 446.

An address to the electors of Great Britain (1739); see G. E. Jensen, in Modern language notes, XL (1925), 57-8.

⁵²See J. E. Wells, "Fielding's political purpose in 'Jonathan Wild,'" Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXI (1913), 21-2, 23, 24, 38-9, 41-2.

But though Fielding attacked the government, he was not entirely satisfied with the way the Opposition was conducting itself. As we have seen, Bolingbroke and Lyttelton and Chesterfield were all very pessimistic about the results that could come from an Opposition with aims so varied, and with methods so irresolute. It was this aspect of the party that Fielding satirized in The opposition. A vision (1742). Fielding says he fell asleep over Cibber's Apology, at the "remarkable Expression . . . 'Here I met the Revolution.'"⁵³ This made him dream that, walking in the highway near London, he "met the Opposition." "It was a Waggon extremely heavy laden, and . . . was drawn by Asses instead of Horses; the Asses were of different Colours and Sizes, and so extremely ill matched, that the whole made the most ridiculous Appearance imaginable. . . ." The drivers have lost the way, and the wagon has stood still for so long that the passengers have no hope of its ever going on. The passengers themselves look in different directions, and call out conflicting orders to the drivers. When they finally get started they meet a coach-and-six, in which sits a "fat gentleman," with a pleasant, good-natured face. "They desired him to alight, and quietly suffer his Coach to be drawn backwards out of their Way, or they would drive over him, and pull him and his Equipage to pieces." At this point, one of the asses reproaches the driver of the wagon, saying that the passengers "have taken their places for the Country," and that their friends will no doubt be angry to hear that they have gone up to St. James's and neglected the business they were sent on. The drivers are for pulling the fat gentleman out of his coach, but the passengers are not satisfied, and many jump out of the wagon.

⁵³The opposition. A vision (London, 1742), p. 3.

The fat gentleman at last has his servants unharness the asses and turn them into a delicious meadow; the passengers leave the wagon, which is drawn out of the way, and the coach drives on, taking with it several of the drivers of the wagon.

This piece was published in December, 1741, when the divisions of opinion in the Opposition had become apparent to most people. It may be said to be a comment on the folly of political parties, of the same sort that Bolingbroke made in his attack. We shall see that Fielding had more to say about this.

By far the most important piece of political satire that Fielding wrote, apart from the plays, was Jonathan Wild, which first appeared in his Miscellanies (1743). In Jonathan Wild, as in Gay's Beggar's opera, the satire consists largely in demonstrating that the great statesman is like the great rogue. And as, by the time that Fielding published the Miscellanies, Walpole had actually fallen, the parallel could be complete: the thief ends by being hanged; the Minister ends by being disgraced. The parallel was, of course, not all the Opposition wished, for Walpole, though dismissed, was scarcely disgraced; yet it was near enough. It seems clear, too, that in Jonathan Wild Fielding remained with the real Opposition, who continued to oppose the government after the Pelham ministry was formed.

The qualities of Jonathan Wild, in his character of a great man, are the qualities that every Opposition writer saw in Walpole: selfish ambition, rapacious avarice, hostility to the idea of liberty, ingenuity in plotting, confidence amounting to impudence. Wild makes a comparison of the lot of the Statesman with that of the "Prig," in terms which suggest Walpole as the Statesman: in the course of it he alludes to the "palace" at Norfolk; and to Walpole's "blunders" in state affairs:

A booty of 10l. looks as great in the eye of a Bridle-cull, and gives as much real happiness to his fancy, as that of as many thousands to the statesman; and doth not the former lay out his acquisitions in whores and fiddles, with much greater joy and mirth, than the latter in palaces and pictures? What are the flattery, the false compliments of his gang to the statesman, when he himself must condemn his own blunders, and is obliged against his will to give fortune the whole honour of his success. . . .⁵⁴

Wild reflects, when he is tempted to save Heartfree:

Nay, to omit that first class of greatness, the conquerors of mankind, how often have numbers fallen by a fictitious plot, only to satisfy the spleen, or perhaps exercise the ingenuity of a member of that second order of greatness the Ministerial!⁵⁵

The constant comparison between the thief and the minister is enforced, too, by such details as the incidental statement regarding the dirty roads to greatness,⁵⁶ and such chapter headings as "A Scheme so deeply laid that it shames all the Politics of this our Age."⁵⁷

With all this, however, the satire on party politics in general seems to me to be quite as important as that on Walpole the Prime Minister. In this, too, of course, Fielding agreed with the ideas of the Opposition. Walpole represented a type of government that Fielding, like Bolingbroke and Chesterfield and Lyttelton, disapproved of. The fact that Jonathan Wild appeared after Walpole had gone out, but while his policy was still thought the ruling one, makes this seem all the more reasonable. And the revisions of 1754 strengthen the impression that Fielding was satirizing party.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Bk. I, chap. v.

⁵⁵Bk. IV, chap. iv.

⁵⁶Bk. I, chap. xiv. Cf. the Statesman's progress (London, 1741).

⁵⁷Bk. III, chap. xi.

⁵⁸See the convenient "World's Classics" edition, pp. 30, 92-5, 142, and notes. Fielding's changes of "prime minister" to "statesman" may have been intended to prevent the later editions

There are two important attacks on party. One is the chapter "Of Hats." Here Wild is exhorting the two parties of "Prigs" to work together, forgetting the differences that have no other meaning "than to impose on the vulgar, and instead of putting great men to the trouble of acquiring or maintaining the substance, to make it sufficient that they condescend to wear the type or shadow of it."⁵⁹ It seems likely that Fielding is recalling the coalition talk of the Opposition--the arguments that parties by their insistence on petty differences of opinion, keep right-minded people from acting together in important things; whereas concerning those important things, there was no essential difference of opinion. To put such sentiments into the mouth of Jonathan Wild was to imply that Walpole made use of parties "to impose on the vulgar."

from being taken as referring to the governments then in power. He did not change in every case to "statesman"; see (same ed.) pp. 63, 100, 199, 253.

⁵⁹Bk. II, chap. vi. Wells, PMLA, XXI, 33-54, discusses both these chapters in detail, seeing them as satire on politics, but emphasizing their satire of Walpole.

In Bk. II, chap. vi, after describing Wild's gang of disreputable characters, he says, "As these Persons wore different Principles, i.e. Hats, frequent dissensions grew among them. There were particularly two parties, viz. those who wore hats fiercely cocked, and those who preferr'd the Nab or Trencher Hat, with the Brim flapping over their Eyes; between which, Jars and Animosities almost perpetually arose."

It is probably worth noting that the "Hats" and the "Caps" were the nicknames of the two political parties in Sweden in 1738, where the political situation was curiously parallel to that in England. According to the Cambridge modern history (New York, 1925), VI, 759-60, Count Arvid Beernhard Horn, who had been in power since 1719 (note the date) was opposed by Count Carl Gyllenberg and Count Carl Gustaf Tessin, and was criticised by them for his "cowardly" policy of peace, just as Walpole was criticised by the Opposition. The period of time being approximately the same, and the charges against them being in part the same, this use of similar names for parties is enough to suggest that Fielding may have chosen to satirize party under the names of actual political parties in a country whose situation was not unlike that of England.

The other passage in which Fielding seems to be satirizing party is the chapter describing the state of affairs in Newgate just after Wild's arrival. Wild challenges Roger Johnson's power in Newgate, and as a result there is a division into parties of the thieves residing there. Why, Fielding asks, should the debtors in the prison have taken sides as they did? They could not hope to gain by the victory of either Wild or Johnson; they were "the destined plunder of both parties." After Wild's victory, when it becomes apparent that the debtors are no better off than before, one of them, "a very grave man, and one of much authority among them," remonstrates with them thus:

What a wolf is in a sheep-fold, a great man is in society. Now, when one wolf is in possession of a sheepfold, how little would it avail the simple flock to expel him and place another in his stead? Of the same benefit to us is the overthrowing one Prig in favour of another. And for what other advantage was your struggle? Perhaps some would say, Is it then our duty tamely to submit to the rapine of the Prig, who now plunders us, for fear of an exchange? Surely No; but I answer, It is better to shake the plunder off than to exchange the plunderer. And by what Means can we effect this, but by a total change of our Manners? Every Prig is a slave. His own Priggish desires, which enslave him, themselves betray him to the tyranny of others. To preserve, therefore, the liberty of Newgate, is to change the manners of Newgate. Let us separate ourselves entirely from the Prigs. . . . Let us, at the same time, separate ourselves farther from Priggism itself. . . . When we separate from the Prigs let us enter into a closer alliance with one another. Let us consider ourselves all as members of one community, to the public good of which we are to sacrifice our private views; not to give up the interest of the whole for every little pleasure or profit which shall accrue to ourselves. Liberty is consistent with no degree of honesty inferior to this, and the community, where this abounds, no Prig will have the impudence or audaciousness to endeavour to enslave. But while one Man pursues his ambition, another his interest, another his safety they must naturally fly to the favour and protection of those who have power to give them what they desire, and to defend them from what they fear; nay, in this view it becomes their interest to promote this power in their patrons. What remains for us but to resolve bravely to lay aside our Priggism, our roguery, in plainer words, and preserve our liberty, or to give up the latter in the preservation and preference of the former.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Bk. IV, chap. 111.

For "prig" read "corrupt politician"; for "Newgate" read "England"; for "plunder" read "corruption" (the more usual word in political writing); and this passage is seen to be an exposition of the principles of the Opposition as Bolingbroke set them forth in his Letters on the history of England, his Dissertation on parties, and his Letter on the spirit of patriotism. Fielding is pleading with public-spirited men (to use a phrase from Bolingbroke) to "change the narrow spirit of party into a diffusive spirit of public benevolence." Fielding does not go so far as to admit the necessity of a Patriot King; he simply states the principle of the people's right to govern and their responsibility for good government. He is saying that the country has allowed itself to be the victim of a mere change of plunderers; that the Opposition has not (in 1743, after the fall of Walpole) achieved its original object of throwing off the system of plunder.

It has been supposed that the "grave man" who makes this speech to the debtors in prison represents Will Shippen. At the time of the attack on Walpole in February, 1741, Shippen had said that it seemed to him "only a scheme for turning out one minister and bringing in another; that as his conduct in parliament had always been regulated with a view to the good of his country, without regard to his own private interest, it was quite indifferent to him, who was in or who was out; and he would give himself no concern in the question."⁶¹ It may be that Fielding had "honest Shippen" in mind, but it is well to remember that there

⁶¹Wells, PMLA, XXI, 51-2, quoting from William Coxe, Memoirs of the life and administration of Sir Robert Walpole (London, 1798), III, 177. Wells suggests also, as does Cross, that the change of ministry alluded to may be that of Townshend to Walpole. Cross, I, 420, thinks that Fielding purposely made the allusion ambiguous, and suggests, pp. 420-22, as the two possibilities the changes of 1730 and 1742.

were others who, after the change of ministers, were doubtful whether any good had been accomplished, and who became convinced that none had been.

The similarity of the thought to that of Bolingbroke has been suggested. The political leaders with whom Fielding was best acquainted (for there is no evidence that he knew or particularly admired Bolingbroke) were Chesterfield and Lyttelton, who were influenced by Bolingbroke's theory. Their attitude, which was that expressed in the Champion and in Common sense after Walpole's resignation, fits the speech of the "grave man" at least as well as Shippen's words do. It seems after all more likely that Fielding should have been thinking in terms of Lyttelton and Chesterfield, during the years when he was associated with them in the publication of the Champion, than that he should have used the words of Shippen, who, while he might be personally respected by Fielding, could scarcely, as a Jacobite, have been Fielding's political hero.

A few other seeming allusions to Walpole may be noticed. In the Journey from this world to the next, published, like Jonathan Wild, in the Miscellanies, Fielding exhibits a spirit who is to go back to the world as a king, setting out on the road to Goodness. Fielding says:

He was gone a little way, when a spirit limped after him, swearing he would fetch him back. This spirit, I was presently informed, was one who had drawn the lot of his prime minister.⁶²

Showing how the lots of the spirits are made as equal as possible Fielding says that the prime minister draws "disgrace," and the patriot, "glory."⁶³ Julian the Apostate, in describing his life

⁶²Chap. v.

⁶³Chap. vi.

as a king, says that it was through his ministers that he "conceived a very unjust opinion" of his people.⁶⁴ Certain circumstances, too, in Julian's life as a statesman recall the portrait of Walpole. Julian says that he "had everything of royalty, but the outward ensigns" and that any man who wanted a place had to get his favor.⁶⁵ The only objection he had to a certain new favorite of the king was that he had had no part in bringing him to favor.⁶⁶

The means the minister takes of getting back into power seems likely to refer to Pulteney and Carteret and their alarms for war with Spain. Julian tells the story of a French nobleman's servant, who was killed in a riot in England. Being ordered to quell the riots, Julian protested, "with great ferocity," that it was his duty to protect those under his government "against the insults of foreigners." He continues his story thus:

This accident was extremely lucky, as it gave my quarrel with the king a popular colour; and so ingratiated me with the people, that when I set up my standard, which I soon after did, they readily and cheerfully listed under my banners, and embraced my cause, which I persuaded them was their own; for that it was to protect them against foreigners that I had drawn my sword. The word foreigners with an Englishman hath a kind of magical effect, they having the utmost hatred and aversion to them. . . . No wonder therefore they espoused my cause in a quarrel which had such a beginning.⁶⁷

Fielding would perhaps have said that some of the Opposition were sincere in pursuing the war, but that there were those among them who used propaganda for war only to get the voice of the people on their side and so to get into office.

Fielding's last word about Walpole, in the Journal of a voyage to Lisbon, was that he was "one of the best of men and of

⁶⁴Chap. xvii.

⁶⁵Chap. xx.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

ministers," and that in his equipment of "a yearly fleet at Spithead," he "at least, treated the nation with a fine sight for their money."⁶⁸ Not much can be made of this. Walpole had been seven years dead; there was no point in attacking him any longer. At the same time, the epithet may be ironic; and there was no great praise in saying that he had given the nation a fine sight for their money, when the money involved, so the Opposition said, was in some twelve years, "no less than fifteen millions, spent in Spithead expeditions and Hide-park reviews."⁶⁹

It appears, from this survey, that Fielding, beginning with rather good-natured ridicule of the political situation, came to agree with one group of the Opposition that Walpole was a bad Prime Minister for England, but that he was not the only corrupt politician in England. His view of politics seems to have been that ideal set up by the Opposition, that men should unite for better government, and that they must, if they wished to be better governed, throw off, not only the corrupt Minister, but the whole system of corruption, among the small as well as among the great.

⁶⁸Under date July 23. "World's Classics" ed., p. 85.

⁶⁹William Cobbett, Parliamentary history of England (London, 1812), XI, 1224.

